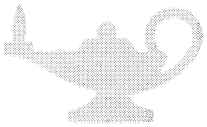
Notes



Chapter 4

1. Valerii Konovalov, "Afghanistan and Mountain Warfare Training," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (hereafter cited as *RL*) 118/88, 17 March 1988, 2—3. Konovalov counted over 100 articles on mountain training in *Voennyi vestnik, Sovetskii voin,* and *Aviatsiia i kosmonavtika* during the 8-year war. For the preceding eight years, he counted fifteen articles, all published in *Voennyi vestnik.* Scott McMichael, "The Soviet Army, Counterinsurgency and the Afghan War," *Parameters* (December 1989):21—35, noted the lack of attention to counterinsurgency in Soviet military literature up to the start of the war.
2. Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 91.
3. Ibid., 93; J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1986), 24; Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Intervention in Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 39; and Graham Turbiville, "Ambush! The Road War in Afghanistan," *Army* (January 1988):34. See also Marie Broxup, "The Soviets in Afghanistan: The Anatomy of a Takeover," *Central Asian Survey,* no. 4 (1983):142.
4. L. Mironov and G. Poliakov, "Afghanistan: The Beginning of a New Life," *International Affairs* (Moscow) (March 1979):54; and Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years,* 24.
5. Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 63—66.
6. Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War,* 101. R. Barnet and E. Ahmad, in "Bloody Games," *The New Yorker,* 11 April 1988, 59, observe that for three days after the takeover, even TASS referred to the event as a coup. Subsequently, all official references treated the event as a revolution.
7. "Sovmestnoe Sovetsko-afganskoe kommunike," *Pravda,* 8 December 1978.
8. Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years,* 39; and Arnold, *Afghanistan,* 82—87.
9. D. Muratov, "Afghanistan," *Komsomol'skaia pravda,* 27 December 1990, as translated in JPRS USSR Report, JPRS-UMA-91-006, 4 March 1991, 61—64.
10. Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War,* 22—23; and David Isby, *War in a Distant Country, Afghanistan: Invasion and Resistance* (London: Arms & Armor, 1989), 19.
11. Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War,* 23.
12. N. Ivanov, "H-Hour" (interview with Colonel General Iu. Tukharinov), *Sovetskaia Rossiia,* 20 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-007, 23 March 1990, 126.
13. For relevant discussion, see the following: Fred Halliday, "The Middle East, Afghanistan and the Gulf in Soviet Perceptions," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* (hereafter cited as RUSI) 129 (December 1984):14; Terry Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984), 80—85, 132—37; Bradsher, *Afghan-*

istan and the Soviet Union, 153—60; Oliver Roy, "Afghanistan: A View From the Interior," *Dissent* (Winter 1981):47—48; Alex Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1988), 21—27; *Special Operations: Military Lessons From Six Selected Case Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Military Studies, 1982), 189; Joseph Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1986), 101—3, 165—69; Selig Harrison, "Dateline Afghanistan: Exit Through Finland?" *Foreign Policy* 41 (Winter 1980—81):163—78; Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); David Gibbs, "Does the USSR Have a 'Grand Strategy'? Reinterpreting the Invasion of Afghanistan," *Journal of Peace Research* 24, no. 4 (1987):366—79; Alam Payind, "Soviet-Afghan Relations From Cooperation to Occupation," *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1989):107—28; and L. B. Teplinskii, *Istoriia Sovetsko-Afganskikh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Mysl, 1988), 278—79.

14. S. Kushnerev, "After Afghanistan," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 21 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-006, 20 March 1990, 21—22.

15. A. Oliinik, "Vvod voisk v afganistan: Kak prinimalos' reshenie," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 November 1989.

16. Ivanov, "H-Hour," 126. See also "Soobshchenie Komiteta Verkhovnogo Soveta po mezhdunarodnym delam po politicheskoi otsenke resheniia o vvode Sovetskikh voisk v Afganistan," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 27 December 1989; Igor Beliaev and Anatolii Gromyko, "This Is How We Ended up in Afghanistan," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 September 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-89-023, 4 October 1989, 43; Oliinik, "Vvod voisk v Afganistan"; O. Yermolina and A. Zubkov, "We Were Not Preaching Evil" (interview with General V. I. Varennikov), *Sovetskii patriot*, 27 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-007, 23 March 1990, 123—25; Sergei Belitsky, "Authors of the USSR's Afghan War Policy," *Report on the USSR*, (*RL*) 195/89, 27 April 1989, 11—12; and Artem Borovik, "Afganistan: Podvodio itogi" (interview with V. I. Varennikov), *Ogonek*, no. 12 (1989):6—8.

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31. U.S. Department of State, Special Report no. 106, December 1982, 3—4; and Girardet, "With the Resistance in Afghanistan." Interviews in Alexiev's, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*, 23, corroborate the pattern described by Girardet.

32. Safronov, "Kak eto bylo," 68.

33. Girardet, "How Stubborn Tribesmen Nibble Russians to Death," 25—26; Arnold, *Afghanistan*, 99; and Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan*, 161.

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38. Varennikov, "Afghanistan," 6—8.

39. Anthony Cordesman, "The Afghan Chronology: Another Brutal Year of Conflict," *Armed Forces* (April 1987):158.

40. Edgar O'Ballance, "Afghanistan: Winds of Change," *Asian Defense Journal*, no. 9 (1986):84; TASS, "Bandits' Lair Wiped Out," *Pravda*, 2 May 1986, as translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (hereafter *CDSP*) 38 (no. 18):21. See also Philip Taubman, "In Kabul, Military Prowess on Parade," *The New York Times*, 19 January 1988; and Tagliabue, "Russians Pressing Afghan Campaign."

41. Branigan, "An Arduous Trek"; and Kempe, "Risky Mission."

42. O'Ballance, "Afghanistan: Winds of Change," 82—84; and TASS, "Bandits' Lair Wiped Out."

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45. G. Pochter, "Nekotorye osobennosti vedeniia operatsii na gorno-pustynoi teatre," *Voina i revoliutsiia*, nos. 3, 4 (1933):57.

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47. Safronov, "Kak eto bylo," 69.

48. Ibid., *Podvig-Vypusk 34*, geroiko-patrioticheskii literaturno-khudozhestvennyi almanakh (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1989), 13; and Artem Borovik, *Afganistan eshche raz pro voine* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1990), 149.

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50. Denny Nelson, "Soviet Air Power: Tactics and Weapons Used in Afghanistan," *Air University Review*, no. 2 (1985):32; and Kenneth Whiting, *Soviet Air Power* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1985), 94.

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52. Bodansky, "Bear on the Chessboard," 286—87; John Gunston, "Su-24's, Tu-16's Support Soviet Ground Forces," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 29 October 1984, 40; and Isby, "Afghanistan 1982," 1524.

53. John Gunston, "Afghans Plan USSR Terror Attacks," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 31 March 1984:481; Nelson, "Soviet Air Power," 36; and Stahel and Bucherer, *Afghanistan 1986/87*, 9.

54. Gennadii Bocharov, *Byl i videl . . . Afganistan 1986/87 god* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1987), 18—19.

55. A. Oliinik, "Mountains Under the Wings," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 April 1985, as translated in JPRS-UMA-85-038, 21 June 1985, 115—17.

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59. Jim Coyne, "Afghanistan Update, Russians Lose Battles But May Win War," *Soldier of Fortune* (December 1982):72; Nelson, "Soviet Air Power," 33; and Gunston, "Su-24's, Tu-16's," 42—43.

60. Elena Lesoto, *Komandirovka na voinu* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 15.

61. Stahel and Bucherer, *Afghanistan 1986/87*, 9, 18; Bodansky, "SAMS in Afghanistan: Assessing the Impact," *Jane's Defence Weekly,* 25 July 1987, 150—54; Edward Girardet, "Afghan Fighters Slowly Erode Soviet Control," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 December 1987; Aaron Karp, "Blowpipes and Stingers in Afghanistan: One Year Later," *Armed Forces Journal International* (September 1987):37—38; John Cushman, "Helping to Change the Course of a War," *The New York Times*, 17 January 1988; Gunston, "Su-24's, Tu-16's," 40; and Cordesman, "The Afghan Chronology," 158.

62. James Hansen, "Afghanistan: The Soviet Experience," *National Defense* (January 1982): 23—24; Nelson, "Soviet Air Power," 37—38; Jossef Bodansky, "Most Feared Aircraft in Afghanistan Is Frogfoot," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 19 May 1984; and V. Bezborodov, "Grach—mashina nadezhnaia," *Aviatsiia i kosmonavtika*, no. 7 (1990):21—23.

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64. Nelson, "Soviet Air Power," 39; Fred Hiatt, "Soviets Use Bombers in Afghanistan," and "Soviet Troops Advance Into Key Afghan Valley," *The Washington Post*, 24 and 27 April 1984; and David Isby, "Soviets in Afghanistan, Prepared for Long Haul," *Defense Week,* 21 February 1984, 14.

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69. Cushman, "Helping to Change the Course of a War."

70. U.S. Department of State, Special Report no. 173, "Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation (December 1987)," 9; Girardet, "Afghan Fighters Slowly Erode Soviet Control"; and Borovik, *Afganistan eshche raz pro voine*, 132—33.

Early in the war, there had been cases of the defection of entire units, such as the 30th Mountain Brigade.[119] Thus, in light of the fragmented and tribalistic character of rural Afghan society, military authorities sanctioned the organization of units on a regional basis in some mountain areas. Adopting a ploy used by the Red Army in the 1920s, the government accepted so-called national regiments, such as the 507th formed in 1987, and included in their ranks many young men who at one time or another had served with the resistance.[120] In 1987, Soviet journalist Artem Borovik acknowledged in the youth-oriented journal *Ogonek* that the local leadership of the new unit extracted conditions from the army before agreeing to serve the DRA. Terms of the deal stipulated that none of the men of the 507th could be conscripted into the regular army, that their arms be provided by the government, and that the unit be charged with the defense of a specific territory. Borovik acknowledged the risks inherent in such arrangements and admitted that in the past some hastily created formations had accepted weapons and then rejoined the resistance at the first convenient opportunity.[121]

The government employed tribal volunteer units to prevent the free movement of guerrillas and their supply trains from Pakistan. The Afghan press made specific references to the creation of such units in Nangarhar province, Badakshan province, and in Paktia. For example, the Ahmadzar tribe in Paktia supposedly raised 1,000 fighters for a 2,500-man regiment to be supported jointly with the men of another tribe. In some instances, the DRA offered payments to tribes such as the Shinwari along the Pakistani border or sought to exploit tribal antagonisms by recruiting a given tribe to curb the activities of a traditionally hostile neighbor. This approach met with some success, especially in the north. Still, sociological shifts caused by the war apparently hampered attempts to organize the tribes. In particular, years of dislocation had undermined the traditional position of tribal chiefs, whose influence had eroded in favor of Islamic leaders of the Jihad.[122] In addition, the regime formed an urban militia, called Defense of the Revolution, consisting of well-paid (by Afghan standards) teenage youths. Urban groups were closely associated with the PDPA and the network of Sovietized governmental and social institutions. Ministry of Interior police, numbering about 30,000, also played a security role.[123]

Yet for all the Kabul regime's efforts in recruitment and indoctrination, a pathological pattern of defections continued to ravage the Afghan Army in 1987. One expedient explanation often raised by the DRA and Soviet press was that DRA soldiers, well-paid by civilian standards, were poorly paid in comparison with resistance mercenaries.[124] If pay was low, however, opportunities for promotion in the Afghan Army beckoned seductively. Soviet journalist Gennadii Bocharov provided an illuminating career profile of Colonel Muhammed Ibragim, who prior to the revolution commanded a platoon with the rank of second lieutenant and then a reconnaissance company. After the establishment of the new regime, he served as the chief of staff for a tank battalion for two years. Ibragim next rose to the positions of battalion commander, chief of the operations section of

Mujahideen warriors directing fire on a government post at Jalalabad

a division, and, finally, brigade commander—all in the span of eight years.[125] *Krasnaia Zvezda* provided a similar account in 1983 of the elevation of a common enlisted man to platoon sergeant and then to lieutenant, although he had no formal military education. Such rapid promotion, the author lamented, "is not exceptional in the current Afghan Army."[126]

Compromises in standards for promotion were matched by concessions in training and discipline. A Soviet journalist reported a minor 1986 incident in which two conscripts refused to obey an order from their lieutenant, and a colonel took it upon himself to persuade them to cooperate! Pressed for an explanation, the colonel acknowledged that such conduct was irregular but added, "we are just creating our army."[127] The lax attitude and divided loyalties of the DRA soldiers were also evident to Western journalists. In 1983, correspondent William Branigan reported spending a night on the trail and receiving breakfast in a DRA militia post.[128] In addition, some Soviet soldiers interviewed by Western writers indicated disdain for the government soldiers. One noted how press coverage of the fighting at Kandahar in 1984 vastly inflated the participation of DRA units, and another described the Afghan Army as "old men and half-wits" who "loafed about at the tail-end during our exercises and hindered us."[129]

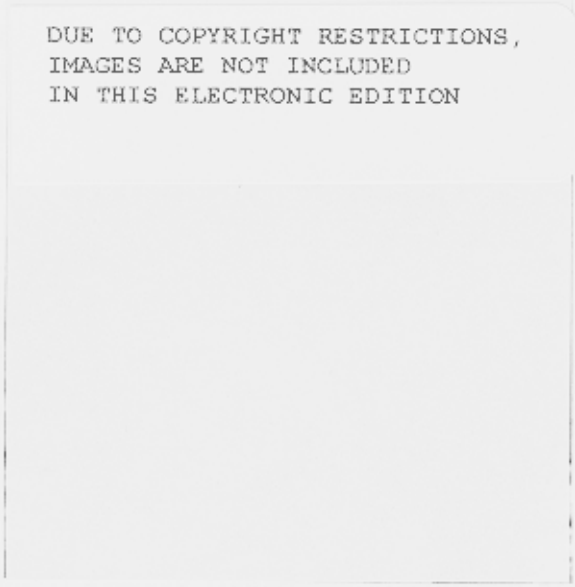
As of 1985, the DRA Army comprised 12 divisions, each about 2,000-men strong, as well as a few independent brigades and special units for a rough total of 43,000.[130] This force proved inadequate to maintain control of the handful of major cities and roads that constituted the very foundation of the regime. Estimates of resistance strength varied widely but ranged from about 20,000 to 100,000 full-time fighters, or as many as 250,000 including part-timers.[131] If one further considers the sympathetic support extended by much of the populace, the network expands geometrically. As was evident from the Soviets' decision early in the war to limit the scale of military commitment, strategists must have hoped that air-mobility, superior firepower, and advanced communications systems would enable Soviet and government forces to operate with an effectiveness far surpassing their numerical strength. Reality did not bear out such optimism. The combination of poorly trained infantry units, abysmal operational security, an unreliable Afghan Army, and declining morale constantly undermined Soviet efforts.

The Political and Cultural Dimensions of the War

Although their successes were modest, it was to the Soviets' credit that they eventually grasped the political and cultural aspects of the war in Afghanistan and encouraged the DRA to address them. Recognizing that one of the principal causes of the civil war had been the dogmatic imposition of socialist concepts on a traditional, religious culture in many ways far removed from the twentieth century, the Soviets urged general secretary of the PDPA, Babrak Karmal, and then Dr. Nadjibullah to reach out to elements of the population that were not already unalterably opposed to the regime. The central component of the DRA's attempt to bolster its legitimacy

Courtesy of T. A. Davis

Afghan guerrillas firing rocket propelled grenades and Kalashnikovs on the airport at Jalalabad



An Afghan father carries his wounded child, a casualty of the war

Courtesy of Contact Press Images-Jim Sheldon

and broaden its popular following was the National Reconciliation Campaign proclaimed by Karmal in November 1985 and reaffirmed by his successor in 1986. Though not the first gesture by the government to win over a skeptical populace, the campaign offered for the first time a comprehensive program of concessions and inducements to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and the good will of the PDPA.

Still, conduct of the war did much to undermine government programs. Military operations too often proceeded with little regard for the civilian populace or its good will. Refugees reported many incidents of looting, firing on civilians, massive aerial bombing, booby trapping, and even occasional executions. Although episodes of this type were never reported officially, the Soviet Army was doubtless aware of the problem and may, on occasion, have acted to police its own conduct. Journalist Francesco Sartori interviewed a former Soviet soldier who claimed one or more Soviet officers had been punished for a mass killing of civilians in an Afghan village.[132] Soviet journalist Borovik later reported a court-martial hearing for a similar offense in Pul-e-khumri.[133] The clearest evidence of the destructive effects of the war, to which the Mujahideen also contributed, was the extraordinary exodus of Afghan peasants to Pakistan, Iran, or even Kabul. In many areas, dis-

affection and dislocation were so great that the government was unable to execute basic functions such as tax collection. At the same time, the Mujahideen often raised their own revenues, sometimes by extorting road tolls from travelers.[134]

Among the first propaganda gestures by the DRA was the amnesty declared in June 1981 which, according to DRA figures, induced about 2,500 resistance fighters to lay down their arms by the fall of 1982.[135] The lack of fanfare in the official press concerning subsequent successes suggests that the achievements of the amnesty campaign were limited at best. Girardet asserted after travels in Afghanistan in 1984 that he encountered from ten to fifteen Afghan Army deserters daily. If this is a reasonable indication, the government probably lost more men than it converted.[136]

In June 1981, the government staged the founding of the National Fatherland Front, an umbrella network designed to reach beyond the ranks of PDPA followers to tribal and regional leaders. Karmal described it as "an authoritative, representative, efficient system of mass political organizations, which will allow us to coordinate and unite together the energy, enthusiasm, and working efforts of all patriots of the country." In addition, the government undertook land reform, construction projects, literacy campaigns, and attempted to promote greater civic equality for women.[137]

Efforts to reorganize Afghan life and rebuild the economy availed the government little. In 1982, the government claimed the initiation of 249 industrial projects and the distribution of land to 300,000 peasant families. However, roughly the same figure on land reform appeared in official announcements as late as 1985. Furthermore, the disruption of normal economic life created shortages and drove prices up sharply in Kabul and elsewhere. Girardet reported in 1982 the doubling of prices in the capital in the span of less than a year.[138]

Another crucial task of the government campaign was to show that the PDPA was not an implacable foe of Islam, a difficult task at best. Accordingly, official radio included in its programming readings from the Koran as well as religious services. In addition, the government restored religious instruction in the schools on the condition that the content was confined to theological matters. In 1987, the Soviet and Afghan governments announced an agreement on the cooperation between their respective official Islamic organizations.[139] By this agreement, the government made its most serious attempt yet to demonstrate its new attitude toward Islam, permitting the operation of twenty separate religious schools and releasing plans for the creation of an Islamic Institute in Kabul. Sorting out this new Soviet policy of embracing religion, Soviet journalist Bocharov commented, "Islam in an Islamic country is not merely a faith, but a way of life."[140]

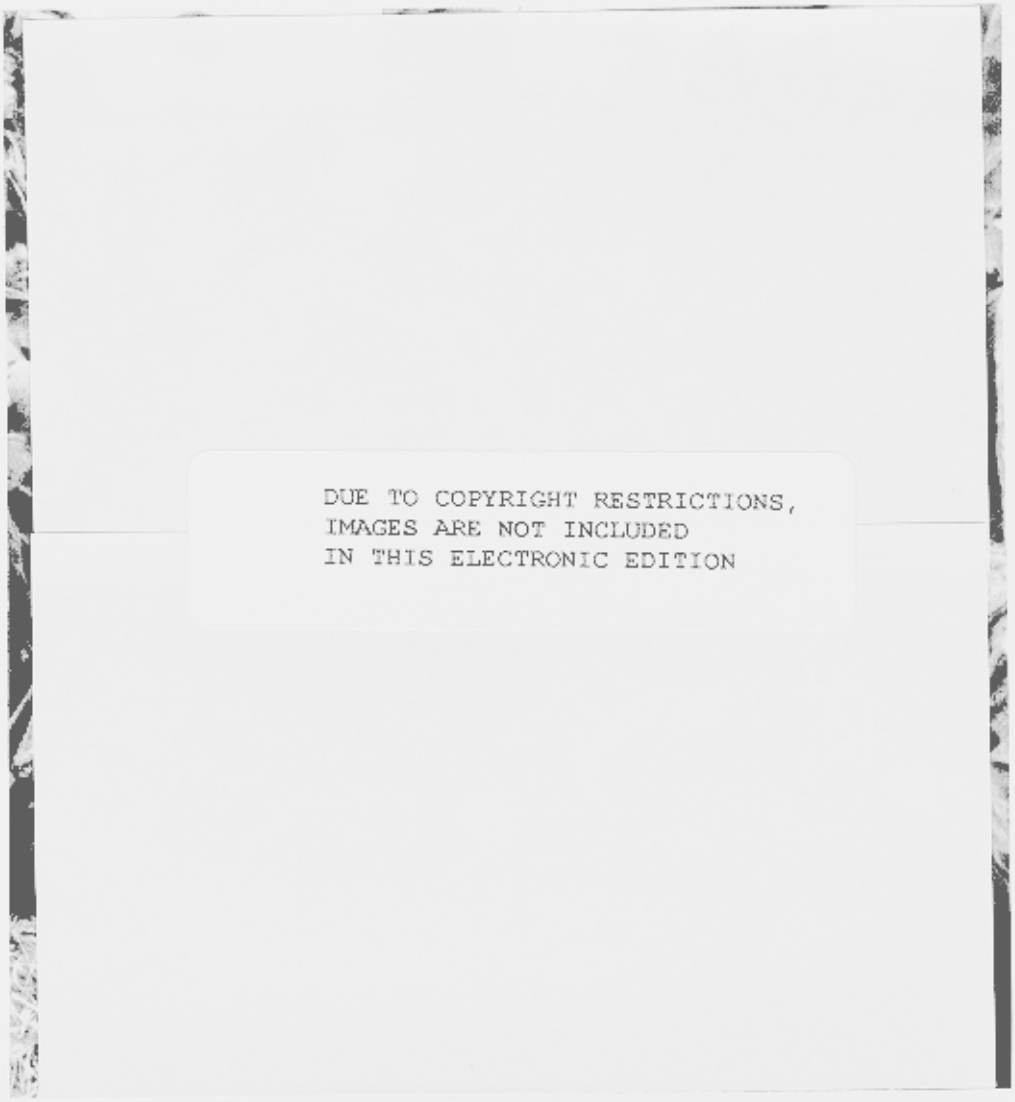
Neither the Soviets nor the DRA were prepared to rely on concessions alone, and early in the war, they embarked on an ambitious program of political education, long a standard element in the building of a Communist government. In 1982, the Kabul regime founded combat-propaganda detachments (*boevye agitatsionnye otriady*) to distribute goods, circulate leaflets,

organize meetings, stage films and concerts, and even offer practical medical tips. Though supposedly engaged in peaceful projects in the countryside, these detachments were prepared to fight when necessary.[141] By the end of 1983, as many as 20,000 young Afghans had traveled to the Soviet Union or other Warsaw Pact states for political indoctrination and schooling. During 1984, the government announced its intent to send several thousand young Afghans, usually between the ages of six and nine, to the USSR for extended periods of training, reportedly as long as ten years. While some of the children were the progeny of party officials, who presumably went with their parents' blessings, or orphans, others were sent off without the consent of their families.[142]

In an attempt to legitimize its rule, the regime in April 1985 convened an assembly in the image of the *loya jirga* (a traditional gathering of local leaders for the purpose of reaching decisions).[143] Though staged with much official fanfare, the meetings had little visible impact, and the general lack of success in winning converts may have been the chief cause of Karmal's removal from office.[144] In an urgent effort to find allies, Nadjibullah subsequently publicized his government's desire to seek out any political groups that might be disposed to compromise, including those of centrist or monarchist political views. As before, the government boasted of remarkable early progress. By 1986, official figures placed membership in the National Fatherland Front at almost a million and membership in the PDPA at 165,000.[145] Later in the year, Nadjibullah, in the same breath, asserted his determination to secure the revolution and made reference to a possible timetable for Soviet withdrawal.[146]

In 1987, Nadjibullah convened another *loya jirga*, which proclaimed a new constitution and renamed the state the Republic of Afghanistan. In January, he declared that representatives of 417 groups (37,000 people) had entered into negotiations with the peoples' regime and cited the effects of new programs for land and water reform. In July, the government reported that 15,000 more rebels had turned in their arms under terms of the new amnesty and reaffirmed its political flexibility: "We are ready to share power with the political opposition and have announced the creation of a multiparty system in the country."[147] Perhaps to reflect this intent, as well as to consolidate his authority, Nadjibullah in 1986 expanded the Central Committee of the PDPA, which by 1988 included not less than six ministers of pre-1978 governments. The composition of local government reflected policy changes as well. The Republic of Afghanistan claimed that over 15 percent of the employees in local organs were former rebels.[148]

The reconciliation drive helped clear the way for the Soviet Union to remove its forces from Afghanistan and, by means of a peculiar twist of reasoning, even served as a justification for the final decision. Soviet journalist Alexander Prokhanov explains it this way: "All this makes it possible to say that the original goals of the DRA were not achieved. They have been renounced by the party itself, by the revolutionary government itself. And that being so, the presence of Soviet troops in the country lost its meaning. Departure is inevitable, logical."[149] What Prokhanov seems to have



Afghan refugee children in Pakistan

been saying in circumspect language was that because Afghanistan was not about to accept socialism, the PDPA chose the inevitable path of political reconciliation, a goal that might be better served by the absence of Soviet forces. Preparations for that absence may have included the decision on 24 March 1988 to consolidate two northern Afghan provinces into one, a move viewed by some foreign observers as presaging the administrative and economic assimilation (not annexation) of the district with Soviet Central Asia.[150]

Much official good news accompanied the announcement of a Soviet withdrawal in 1988, notwithstanding the fact that the major resistance

organizations still refused to deal with the Republic of Afghanistan on any terms. *Krasnaia zvezda*, for instance, reported on 22 March that approximately 120,000 refugees had returned to their homeland. It added, however, in a factual note that belied past claims, that this figure exceeded by twenty-five times the number of returnees in all previous years of the war.[151] Furthermore, in light of estimates that 5 million or more Afghans fled their homeland during the war for refuge in Pakistan or Iran, the reported flow of returnees to Afghanistan would still represent but a trickle. Yet many war-weary Afghans undoubtedly welcomed the prospect of a respite.[152]

The continuation of bitter combat in Afghanistan also suggested that official estimates of the situation were too sanguine. Soviet forces remained committed to combat operations throughout 1987. Toward the end of the year, the *Moscow News*—emerging in 1987 as one of the more outspoken and independent Soviet press organs—solicited a comment from a former Soviet commando platoon leader on the results of national reconciliation. He replied, "I honestly don't know. They are showing doushmans on TV laying down their arms, but the number of heavily wounded [Russians] is not decreasing." In a similar vein, an Afghan Army colonel told *Ogonek* that the campaign of national reconciliation was not progressing "as well as we at first calculated."[153] Soviet forces withdrew from provincial garrisons, a few quickly capitulated or were evacuated, but the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan was not imminent. On the contrary, given its army, security apparatus, fortifications around Kabul, and generous material assistance from the USSR—not to mention the inherent disunity of the opposition—the regime's survival prospects were better than many in the West realized. Until 1992, when Russian material aid ceased and Nadjibullah fled Kabul, the possibility loomed that at least some resistance factions would find a way to coexist with a relatively weak regime stripped of its former ideological character. Even then, many servants of the DRA remained in Kabul to work on the new order.

The Soviet Home Front

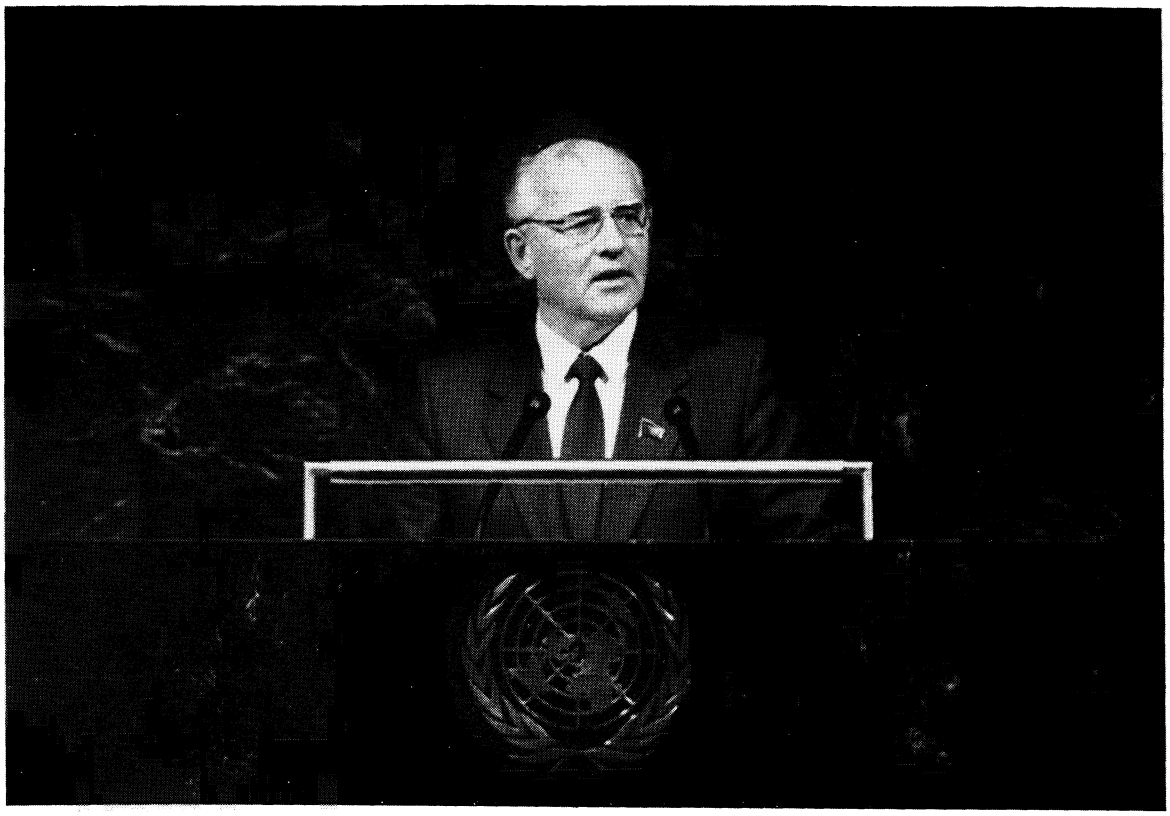
For many years, the view that public opinion in the Soviet Union played no role whatsoever in the conduct of Soviet foreign affairs was almost an article of faith among Western analysts. In fact, even in the aftermath of the Afghan War, it was still difficult to ascribe any tangible influence to popular sentiment, but as the war dragged on, growing numbers of Soviet citizens began to question its purpose. Many veterans of the war returned confused and embittered, confused by the gap between what they were told to expect in Afghanistan—an appreciative citizenry and a clearly defined enemy, including Americans and Chinese at first—and what they found. They were also embittered by what they perceived as a lack of support, even duplicity, by their Afghan allies and, until the very end of the war, a lack of public gratitude at home. While few except steadfast dissidents openly questioned the moral and political merits of the cause in 1980, eight years of mounting casualties—the source of endless speculation due to the denial

of any hard information from the government—and accumulating doubt about the prospects of success gnawed incessantly at public confidence. One obvious manifestation of such sentiment was the determination of many parents to shield their sons from military service in Afghanistan.

During the first years of the war, the state press presented images of Soviet soldiers protecting civilians and engaging in civic projects amidst a grateful Afghan populace committed to saving the fruits of their socialist revolution. The Mujahideen were often depicted as bandits, and comparisons were sometimes drawn to the Basmachis.[154] Only after several years did the press begin to acknowledge the reality that young Soviets were killing and being killed and that the struggle was a hard one. The tone of reporting changed markedly in 1987, reflecting General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* campaign and his frank depiction of the war as "burdensome and painful."[155] Slightly veiled admissions that the war was stalemated, that the Republic of Afghanistan had failed to rally a majority (or even a substantial plurality) of the population to its side, that unpleasant aspects of the war had not been candidly depicted in the media, and that a change of policy was necessary paved the way for an announcement that Soviet forces would be withdrawn before the achievement of a decisive resolution in Afghanistan.[156]

The disgruntlement among Soviet veterans of Afghanistan received much attention in the Soviet press beginning in 1987. By far the most striking and candid commentary was a serialized account in *Ogonek* by Artem Borovik describing the grim nature of the combat and war weariness among Soviet soldiers. Many reports described the use of alcohol and hashish among Soviet soldiers. According to one guerrilla leader in Nangarhar province, "They use alcohol all the time, and if someone gives them a little hashish, they'll give him a Kalashnikov."[157] The widespread feeling among veterans that they had not been welcomed home was especially well documented. In a particularly dramatic instance, *Krasnaia zvezda* published on 22 March 1988 the letter of the father of a veteran who returned to his homeland an invalid, utterly unprepared for an indifferent public reception and calloused treatment by the medical bureaucracy.[158] Another article in a Tajik newspaper suggested that not all veterans felt welcome and that few were admitted to the Communist Party or other responsible positions. Manifestations of official gratitude to Afghanistan veterans, such as memorials, appeared belatedly but not before many veterans protested their plight.[159] Public concern continued to mount over those who had not returned. In 1990, *Izvestiia* reported that about 100 Soviet prisoners remained in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and over 300 soldiers were officially listed as missing. Furthermore, the paper challenged the failure of the government to create an official commission to secure their return.[160]

The war also raised doubts about the fairness of conscription policies in the USSR. On 25 November 1987, *Pravda* printed the letter of a Moscow worker who complained that the sons of officials had avoided service in Afghanistan. Similar allegations appeared in *Krasnaia zvezda* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*.[161] In stark contrast to reports throughout most of the war



Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reassessed his country's position in Afghanistan and sought international agreements to facilitate its military disengagement

that suggested Soviet youths were proud to perform their "internationalist duty"—the common official euphemism for military service in Afghanistan—letters published in *Sobesednik* pointed out that many young Soviets sought to avoid service in Afghanistan and could not comprehend the mission there. In fact, reports surfaced at the end of the war that Soviet personnel officers had extorted money from parents to guarantee that their sons would not serve in a combat area. In addition, a postwar opinion survey indicated that among the *afgantsy*—soldiers who served in Afghanistan—fully as many, 17 percent, considered their service a "disgrace" as were proud of it. Among the general public, 46 percent viewed such service as a "disgrace," whereas 6 percent found it a source of pride.[162] Equally troublesome to the Soviet government was the possibility that incipient nationalist tendencies emerging in some Central Asian republics of the USSR were related to the war in Afghanistan.[163] Broadcasts from Iran and Pakistan in the native languages of the region, calculated to play upon ethnic and religious sympathies, almost certainly evoked some response. Soviet press reports depicting the Afghan revolution as besieged by U.S. and Chinese mercenaries—though probably accepted at first—now met with skepticism. William Branigan interviewed a former Soviet soldier of Turkoman origin who claimed that even before his own tour of military service began, he knew such reports to be untrue. Having since cast his lot with the Afghan resistance, he said, "I am a Moslem and I am fighting against non-Moslems." Another Soviet soldier from Estonia said the Central Asians tended to "stick

together" and most knew little Russian. Widespread allegations that some Central Asians serving in Afghanistan early in the war proved politically unreliable lend credence to this view.[164]

All problems notwithstanding, it would be wrong to attribute the Soviet decision to pull out of Afghanistan to the effects of public disillusionment. At no time during the war were there large-scale manifestations of organized opposition to Soviet policy. However, the government could hardly fail to notice that support was flagging. Nor did international disapproval, even among Islamic and Third World states, play a decisive role. Rather, in light of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's commitment to galvanize public support in the pursuit of new national priorities, the Afghan War was an obvious liability.

Conclusion

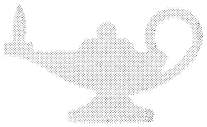
Perhaps the fundamental Soviet problem in the war was that Afghanistan does not constitute a true nation but in a practical sense can be viewed, in the words of Anthony Arnold, as "25,000 village states."[165] Once it became clear that military action could not compensate for the inability of the DRA or Republic of Afghanistan to win popular support and that it was impractical to build a Soviet-model socialist state in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had to choose a new course. Such a choice became possible only with the selection of Gorbachev, whose personal prestige as general secretary in 1985 was not tied to the preceding Afghan policy. Only a staggering Soviet military commitment could have forced a cessation of guerrilla resistance, and even then, there would have been no certainty that the Afghanistan government could stand on its own. Thus, continuation of the Soviet presence would necessarily have entailed a continuing, perhaps unmanageable, drain on Soviet resources. In other words, no fully satisfactory Soviet outcome could be achieved on the battlefield alone.

Indeed, the Soviet military presence may have been a liability to the Soviet cause. Soviet journalist A. Bovin, writing in *Izvestiia* in December 1988, admitted as much:

> . . . the overall effect of the presence of Soviet troops and their participation in combat operations clearly proved negative. We ourselves handed the counter-revolutionary forces some powerful means of influencing public perceptions. The foreign intervention stirred patriotism, and the appearance of "infidels" spawned religious intolerance. On such a field, even a tie would have been miraculous.[166]

To the Soviets' credit, once this recognition dawned on them, they were able to reverse their policy.

Notes



Chapter 4

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2. Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 91.
3. Ibid., 93; J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1986), 24; Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Intervention in Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 39; and Graham Turbiville, "Ambush! The Road War in Afghanistan," *Army* (January 1988):34. See also Marie Broxup, "The Soviets in Afghanistan: The Anatomy of a Takeover," *Central Asian Survey,* no. 4 (1983):142.
4. L. Mironov and G. Poliakov, "Afghanistan: The Beginning of a New Life," *International Affairs* (Moscow) (March 1979):54; and Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years,* 24.
5. Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 63—66.
6. Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War,* 101. R. Barnet and E. Ahmad, in "Bloody Games," *The New Yorker,* 11 April 1988, 59, observe that for three days after the takeover, even TASS referred to the event as a coup. Subsequently, all official references treated the event as a revolution.
7. "Sovmestnoe Sovetsko-afganskoe kommunike," *Pravda,* 8 December 1978.
8. Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years,* 39; and Arnold, *Afghanistan,* 82—87.
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12. N. Ivanov, "H-Hour" (interview with Colonel General Iu. Tukharinov), *Sovetskaia Rossiia,* 20 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-007, 23 March 1990, 126.
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14. S. Kushnerev, "After Afghanistan," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 21 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-006, 20 March 1990, 21—22.

15. A. Oliinik, "Vvod voisk v afganistan: Kak prinimalos' reshenie," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 November 1989.

16. Ivanov, "H-Hour," 126. See also "Soobshchenie Komiteta Verkhovnogo Soveta po mezhdunarodnym delam po politicheskoi otsenke resheniia o vvode Sovetskikh voisk v Afganistan," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 27 December 1989; Igor Beliaev and Anatolii Gromyko, "This Is How We Ended up in Afghanistan," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 September 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-89-023, 4 October 1989, 43; Oliinik, "Vvod voisk v Afganistan"; O. Yermolina and A. Zubkov, "We Were Not Preaching Evil" (interview with General V. I. Varennikov), *Sovetskii patriot*, 27 December 1989, as translated in JPRS-UMA-90-007, 23 March 1990, 123—25; Sergei Belitsky, "Authors of the USSR's Afghan War Policy," *Report on the USSR*, (*RL*) 195/89, 27 April 1989, 11—12; and Artem Borovik, "Afganistan: Podvodio itogi" (interview with V. I. Varennikov), *Ogonek*, no. 12 (1989):6—8.

17. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 9—31, 58—64.

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34. Dupree, "Afghanistan in 1982," 136; Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years*, 132; and U.S. Department of State, Special Report, no. 106, 3—4.

35. Dupree, "Afghanistan in 1983," 235; Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years*, 133, 145; Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, 85—86; William Branigan, "Bombed Village Is a Symbol of Resistance," *The Washington Post*, 19 October 1983; and "Guerrilla Leader Uses Time Versus Soviets," *The Washington Post*, 18 October 1983.

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74. Branigan, "Moscow's Troops."

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76. B. V. Gromov, "Zashchishchali, obuchali, stroili," 11.

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